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ABSTRACT

This booklet is a special tribute to Lou Henry Hoover, wife of President Herbert Hoover, from a close friend, social secretary, and chief research assistant to the First Lady. The small booklet provides a look at the social history of the era by focusing on Lou Henry Hoover and her interest in the outdoors. Lou Henry Hoover was the first women to be graduated from Leland Stanford University with a geology major. Her work in preservation of the outdoors and in conservation of resources are highlighted. Her interest in the Girl Scout movement in 1917 arose from the Hoover's concern for the well-being of the U.S. child. From 1917 to the end of her life, Girl Scouting was one of her great enthusiasms and devotions. Mrs. Hoover's influence on various programs of the Girl Scouts is described. In 1945, the Girl Scouts established the Lou Henry Hoover Memorial Forests and Wildlife Sanctuaries, for the conservation of forest lands, soil, waterways, or wildlife. (EH)

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# Lou Henry Hoover and The Girl Scouts

## A Tribute by Dare Stark McMullin

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# Lou Henry Hoover and the Girl Scouts

## A Tribute by Dare Stark McMullin

The love of open spaces and the joy of "roughing it" came to Lou Henry Hoover as a girl when she went tramping and trailing and camping in the California hills with her father. Sometimes, with full packs on their backs, they hiked fifteen or twenty miles, pitching their tents where the spirit moved them and the fish were likely to bite. Sometimes they slept in the open under the stars.

Her father was an amateur naturalist and an expert woodsman. These trips with him were fascinating journeys of adventure and discovery to the buoyant, eager young girl. Every step of the way brought forth some fact or lore or legend about the rocks, the flowers, the trees, the birds, the animals. All along the way, too, there were new arts and skills of outdoor living to be learned: how to find her way in the wilds, locating direction by day from the sun, by night from the stars or the vegetation on the hills; how to build a fire, even with wet wood; how to catch and clean a fish, how to shoot game when needed for food, how to cook a tempting meal over an open fire--in short, how to take complete independent care of herself in the mountains or by the sea.

With such a background, small wonder it was that Lou Henry Hoover as a student in Leland Stanford University specialized in geology, a pioneering venture for a woman at that time. She was the first woman to be graduated from the university as a geology major!

"Few women were then interested in the sciences," says a close college friend, "but we haunted the laboratories. Our friends were largely men and women with scientific interests. Our idea of the perfect weekend was to don blue denim togs and canvas leggings (our skirts were far too short for the proprieties of those days and brought out many a lifted eyebrow and a host of field glasses for long-range views) and with a group of congenial friends set out for a collecting trip.

"An ancient rattletrap wagon drawn by equally weather-worn nags was piled high with blanket rolls, collecting-kits, nets, shovels

and picks, smudgy pots, food, guitars or banjos. Then we took to the trail. What a wonderful tramper Lou was, too! After the day of collecting, the campfire was gay with laughs and songs and stories. Never was Lou happier or more completely her real self than when resting after a day's tramp, under the open sky, listening to 'good' talk or better silence while campfire light flickered on the leaves overhead."

It was while she was at Leland Stanford that she met Herbert Hoover, a senior when she was a freshman. She was the only girl in the geology class, and soon he was the only man who counted with Lou Henry. A year after her graduation, they were married in an old mission in Monterey. His work as a mining engineer immediately took the young couple to China--and succeeding years found them establishing homes in many far-flung lands--Mandalay, Japan, Australia, Russia, England.

Her outdoor experience, plus her native adaptability and enthusiasm, stood her in good stead in this gypsy pioneering life. Wherever she went, however rugged the conditions, she made home out of houses all around the world. She said once, "you know I've never yet seen a room that I didn't want to do something to." And she always did that something--gave that living touch--to every room, every house she ever lived in. But she always did something else. She found and kept a wild place close at hand for the family to snatch a little living time in, a place that could be let alone.

When they went to live in the White House, the Hoover family went scouting around in the Blue Ridge Mountains till they found at the headwaters of the Rapidan, a place that was like the original wilderness of colonial days. That place had a camp built on it, comfortable enough for people who lived in great houses, even palaces. But Lou Henry Hoover saw that the woods were untouched still.

She didn't fuss about other people's ways of enjoying wild places. If a scientific friend wanted to clamber off her horse and pick a flower to take home to paint, that was good science as well as art. If her husband on horseback wanted to ride along a trail breaking off dead branches that might hit other riders, that was fine. If roads had to be straightened out and flattened some for people who found driving over Blue Ridge hills a scary mountain adventure, that was a "must" -- though if a farm popped up in her own paths, she had the path shifted

around it. But she *did* balk at having all the paths lined with large whitewashed rocks (a guide for visiting strangers, set up by the military). "No whitewashed rocks in our camp," said Mrs. Hoover. So there weren't any.

There wasn't any special type of place that she loved--or any particular part of the country. A place was best of all to her when you didn't own it, when it was free, when other respectful people came after your campfire and left the place still untouched. It didn't even have to be much of a place; it could just be a view, as long as it was a view you could discover for yourself. Every road she went over she "collected" views, running up little side roads when she could and spotting the best lookout point. Lou Henry Hoover kept dates with the sunset on hilltops all over America, often with a car full of Girl Scouts of any or all ages.

When life became more complicated in her heavily responsible days, and she couldn't get away to a wild place for a week, or overnight, or even for a meal, she made-do at home. Every house she ever lived in had a little open-air corner, or a big one, for an outdoor meal -- on her wide bricked roof in California, on the porch wreathed in gourd vines at the G-street house in early Washington days, under the south-garden magnolias of The White House.

Mrs. Hoover first became associated with the Girl Scout movement in 1917. Her interest in it arose from her own and her husband's concern for the well-being of the American child. He was at that time Food Commissioner, and both he and his wife realized so keenly how the sad lack of proper food, housing, and recreational facilities had warped the lives of the war-abnormal little Europeans.

But Lou Henry Hoover was a Girl Scout in spirit all of her life. She herself once said, "I was a Scout years ago, before the movement ever started, when my father took me hunting, fishing and hiking in the mountains. Then I was sorry that more girls could not have what I had. When I learned of the movement I thought, here is what I always wanted other girls to have."

From 1917 to the very end of her life, Girl Scouting was one of her great enthusiasms and she devoted herself to it heart and soul. During those years she served in many and varied official capacities--deputy commissioner in Washington, council member in Palo Alto, and in the national organization, vice-president, member-at-large and

chairman of the board of directors, president, honorary president and honorary vice-president. She was also a leader of her own Girl Scout troop in Washington for ten years.

"Troop 8," reminisces one of its former members, "was made up of fifteen-to eighteen- year-old girls . . . . who were members of other troops but worked with Mrs. Hoover as a group to be called upon for participation in civic demonstrations, parades, international conferences, and so forth. We served at international Scout luncheons, demonstrated Scouting to the public and perhaps were the first Senior Service troop.

"Mrs. Hoover was the ideal leader for this group. We were fired with her enthusiasm and most of us acted as assistants in other troops or went as junior counsellors to summer camps. I have never been able to leave Scouting--for she made us feel that we grew best as we served others.

"She was genuinely interested in all of us. We could see her at any time, all during her Washington days. Every graduation day - high school, college, and postgraduate -- brought each of us flowers, telegrams, or cards. Even our weddings and our babies were a source of interest to her.

"She taught me enough about birds for me to pass my bird-finder badge at the National Museum; encouraged me to know more and more trees by observing those in her garden and the streets near her home; and when I needed only one more nature badge for my Golden Eaglet, took me all thru her house, where we held our meetings, and made me tell the source, method of processing, and reason for using practically every metal or stone piece in her home--and *she knew her Geology.*"

The influence of Lou Henry Hoover in Girl Scouting is difficult to evaluate. She was but one of many able women devoting themselves to the movement during its critical formative years. But her enthusiasm, indefatigable labor and prestige, certainly played an important role in developing it from a small group of about 15,000 in 1917, with troops in only a few cities, to a well established, nationwide organization at the end of 1945, with a membership of more than 840,000.

To give more and more girls a better and better program was her aim always. The nature program, it goes without saying, was a

cardinal concern. Lou Henry Hoover encouraged and worked ardently toward enlarging its scope and raising its standards. Her hope was that it might be developed so that, in the eyes of qualified teachers of science, it provided an excellent background for later work in schools and colleges--by training in observation and a mental awareness of living things in their natural environment. The Girl Scout nature program today is recognized as one of the best thought-out nature programs available for youth. Mrs. Hoover herself had a hand in working out the geology section.

Girl Scout camping--what an inspiration she was to that! Being so expert and enthusiastic a camper herself, she was eager for all girls to have a chance to go camping and learn to take care of themselves out-of-doors. In 1926 when she was President of the national organization, she posed the question at a convention: "What are we doing for our girls whose troops do not meet during the summer and when for various reasons cannot attend the summer camps?" Day camp has become the answer to that question, and has given a camping experience to many thousands of girls who otherwise would not have had it.

Lou Henry Hoover the Girl Scout camper, whether as hostess to national leaders at Rapidan, guest at a Girl Scout camp, or leader of Troop 8 at the Girl Scout cabin in Chevy Chase, was always so completely natural and participated so actively that she immediately put the shyest person at ease. She directed classes often, led in story telling round the fire at night, and turned out before breakfast for bird walks, swinging through the woods with a lithe light stride.

Leaders' training was another phase of Girl Scouting that was of deep concern to Mrs. Hoover. Largely through her influence, a generous grant was obtained in 1922 from the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial to establish courses in Girl Scout leadership in colleges and universities throughout the country.

Because of her interest in gardening and conservation, and her interest in Girl Scouting, the Lou Henry Hoover Girl Scout Scholarship in Gardening was founded in 1930 by The Woman's National Farm and Garden Association, at the School of Horticulture for Women at Ambler, Pennsylvania. It is awarded biannually, to Girl Scouts only, and provides more than half the expense and maintenance for the two-year course.

Ever zealous in the welfare of all young people, boys and girls, Lou Henry Hoover gave her support to many youth organizations, but the Girl Scouts had an special place in her heart always and received the full measure of her devotion. Goucher College formally recognized her leadership when it awarded her in 1931 an honorary LL.D. degree for activity in social service, particularly that in interest of Girl Scouts.

## The Lou Henry Hoover Memorial Forests and Wildlife Sanctuaries

In tribute to Lou Henry Hoover's constant effort to promote the conservation of natural resources, and her great desire to have the Girl Scouts "do something about it," plans were set up by the Girl Scouts early in 1945 for the Lou Henry Hoover Memorial Forests and Wildlife Sanctuaries, for the conservation of forest lands, soil, waterways or wildlife.

The Forests or Sanctuaries may be established in any part of the country by either lone troops or troops under councils. They may be either on camp sites or other property owned by Girl Scouts; on public land (such as a part of a national or state forest, if permission is granted); or, as community forests or sanctuaries, on city or town land. At least one year must be spent in surveying the flora and fauna of the site, and a ten-year plan must be made for its future use and development. . .

"There couldn't be a more appropriate 'remembering' of Lou Henry Hoover than this Girl Scout keeping safe of wild places," says a woman who knew her well. It is the very spirit of what she wanted most for little, and young, and grown American girls.

Most people who loved their youth, and are grateful for it, want to pass on to younger girls and women what they themselves learned. Lou Henry Hoover was wiser. She wanted to give to youth the places and conditions where wise things are best learned. The woods, the rivers, the trails, the hills, the fire-ring in the dark -- all to be lived in

and learned by, in fun and companionship. She liked nothing better that to be asked to be a companion when people -- children and adults -- went out looking for wild places to keep safe.

All who ever loved Lou Henry Hoover -- and how many many lucky ones there are! -- knew that her spirit will be along in the Lou Henry Hoover Memorial Forest and Wildlife Sanctuaries. "Let's go walking!"

***Dare Stark McMullin*** *was a close friend of Lou Henry Hoover for many years. Her father, Herbert Stark, was also a mining engineer and a graduate of Stanford University. Dare lived with the Hoovers for several months when Mr. Hoover was Secretary of Commerce. In 1930 she returned to Washington as one of Mrs. Hoover's social secretaries and lived in the White House until the end of the Hoover Administration.*

*When Mrs. Hoover became interested in documenting the history of the White House and its furnishings, Dare became her chief research assistant. Together they produced a history of White House customs and furnishings which has served as a starting point for several subsequent White House renovations. When the Hoovers returned to California in 1933, Dare continued working for them on the Stanford campus. After Mrs. Hoover's death in January 1944 the Girl Scouts asked Dare to prepare this special tribute to her mentor and friend.*